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WelcomeBC

NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Attorney General
and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism

WELCOMEBC BUILDS ON SUCCESSES WITH NEW PROGRAM

VANCOUVER – A pioneering new program aimed at finding ways to ensure communities and workplaces are welcoming and inclusive was announced today by Attorney General and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism Wally Oppal during the first-year celebration of the launch of WelcomeBC.

"Communities and workplaces across the province will be stronger for their participation in this program," Oppal said. "All British Columbians can realize the benefits of building welcoming communities, addressing racism and valuing our cultural diversity. It's a win-win for all of us."

The Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces program will strengthen community capacity to support immigrant settlement and integration, eliminate racism, and value and respect multiculturalism. The three-year initiative will receive funding of $10 million annually.

The program recognizes integration of immigrants as a two-way process that involves commitment on the part of newcomers to adapt to life in B.C. and on the part of British Columbians and Canadians to welcome and adapt to new people and cultures.

Initiatives will vary by community, depending on local needs and existing capacity. Initial funding will be provided to communities based on grant applications to support community partnerships.

Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces is made up of four key elements: community partnership development, knowledge development and exchange, public education, and demonstration projects. Communities can apply for funding to support community partnership development starting July 2. Applications will be available at: www.WelcomeBC.ca. The remaining elements will be rolled out later this fall.

Over one-quarter of all British Columbians, and more than one-third of Vancouverites, were born outside of Canada. Canada's Aboriginal population has also grown by 45 per cent since 1996, outpacing the eight per cent growth in the non-Aboriginal population. B.C. is home to 17 per cent of Canada's total Aboriginal population.

"All British Columbians share a responsibility to recognize, respect and support the diversity of cultural and indigenous heritages across the province," said Dave S. Hayer, parliamentary secretary for multiculturalism and immigration.

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As B.C. was home to Aboriginal communities with distinct languages, cultures, spiritual beliefs and vibrant societies long before the recent era of immigration to this province, the program will support the building of communities that are welcoming and inclusive for all. Local communities will be encouraged to engage Aboriginal and First Nations communities in their initiatives.

A 2002 Statistics Canada national ethnic diversity survey shows over 66 per cent of Vancouver immigrant survey respondents have experienced discrimination at work or when applying for a job or promotion. This compares with 37.4 per cent of respondents who experienced discrimination in a store, bank or restaurant. Of visible minority respondents, 73.9 per cent of those who reported discrimination believe it is based on their race or skin colour.

"Multiculturalism is embedded in our constitution and it's important that we recognize that," Oppal said. "I asked to be the Minister responsible for Multiculturalism because I want to see our communities pull together to be more inclusive and deal with racism when it occurs."

This program is supported by the Government of Canada through the Agreement for Canada-British Columbia Co-operation on Immigration. Funding is provided by the Ministry of Attorney General under WelcomeBC, a provincial initiative uniting B.C.'s settlement and integration services and initiatives under one umbrella, as announced by Premier Gordon Campbell on June 13, 2007.

For information on WelcomeBC, go to www.WelcomeBC.ca.

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